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THE  
INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY  
ON THE  
CONDITION OF THE WORLD:

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A SERMON,  
PREACHED IN  
TRINITY CHAPEL, CONDUIT STREET,

ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1789,

BY THOMAS COOMBE, D.D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST. K.

ALL THE ENDS OF THE WORLD SHALL REMEMBER, AND TURN  
UNTO THE LORD; AND ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE NATIONS  
SHALL WORSHIP BEFORE HIM.—PSALM xxii. 27.

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L O N D O N:

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THE  
INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY  
ON THE  
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A  
SERIES OF  
MONUMENTS



TRINITY CHURCH, CONDUIT STREET

ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1850

BY THOMAS COOMBE, D.D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST

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LONDON

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## A S E R M O N, &c.

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I S A I A H, Chap. xi. ver. 9.

THEY SHALL NOT HURT, NOR DESTROY, IN ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN: FOR THE EARTH SHALL BE FULL OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD, AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA.

**I**N this sublime chapter, the prophet is describing some future illustrious period, when our earth shall again be the abode of innocence and tranquillity. He anticipates, in a strain of rapture, the appearance of a DIVINE RULER, by whom this renovation shall be effected, and whose reign shall only terminate with the existence of the world. The pacific temper of that dominion, which he is thus to exercise over intellectual nature, is represented, after the oriental manner, by a variety of bold, figurative, allusions.



*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt, nor destroy, in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

By the HOLY MOUNTAIN, in this place, is generally understood the kingdom of Christ; and the sum of the prophecy, divested of metaphor, amounts to this; That there is, in the administration of Providence, a determined period, in which violence and oppression shall no more deform the world, and when, the passions of men being subjected by degrees to the power of religion, interest shall no longer make man the enemy of man, nor excite animosity between nation and nation. They shall all at length discover, that piety and benevolence constitute the perfection and happiness of their nature, and shall joyfully submit to the Redeemer's government, which shall finally be established, in truth and purity, over the face of the habitable earth.

It is obvious to remark, that this prediction is far enough from its completion. At the end of more than seventeen hundred years, Christianity still continues to divide its triumphs with Pagan and Mahometan superstition; and, even in countries where it is received,



received, hath not hitherto produced the glorious effects that might be expected from it. In some of these, it has been debased by idolatrous and unworthy mixtures, and, in almost all of them, hath been called upon, at one time or other, to consecrate the sword of persecution.

This, however, the Saviour himself foretold would be the case; by which he hath given us another proof of the divinity of his character, and confirmed our expectation that he will continue to reign, till, through various dispensations, he shall have put all enemies under his feet. Such is the concurrent voice of prophecy. "The kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."\* "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it."† "They shall not hurt, nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

In a lower sense, these prophecies have had their accomplishment, in the amazing change produced in the world, by the appearance of the *Sun of Righteousness*, after the long night of Heathenism. In the short interval of forty years, Christianity had penetrated every quarter of the vast Imperial territory, and had even dawned on the British islands; exposing, in its bright career, the gods of

\* Rev. xi. 15.

† Isaiah ii. 2.

the nations, confounding the oracles, and engaging multitudes every where to renounce their inveterate superstitions. And thus led on, *conquering and to conquer*, the religion of the SON of MARY possessed the throne of the CÆSARS, before the close of the third century from the crucifixion; and, not long after, triumphantly established itself on the ruins of the capitol. Its influence hath, in fact, been felt throughout the earth; and, though, like the common blessing of light, unheeded in its silent operation, we are indebted to it, as a principle, for the advancement of society, and for the best comforts even of the present life. The condition of PAGANISM hath been meliorated by it, in various districts, where it hath not hitherto obtained a solid settlement. It hath imparted to MAHOMETANISM the truths incorporated with its fables. And even the eyes of modern DEISM, so ungratefully employed in magnifying the imperfections of CHRISTIANITY, derive their boasted clearness from its restoring power.

Take a view of the theology of the EMPIRE, immediately before the promulgation of the gospel, confessedly one of the most luminous periods of its history, and see how little, genius and learning were able to achieve, towards the discovery of the true God, of his nature, or of his perfections. One famous sect\* held that the world was the work of chance; and that the gods gave no sort of attention to human affairs. Another sect professed to be uncertain, whether the gods existed or not.† Whilst the

\* Epicureans.

† Academics.

Stoics,

Stoics, by much the least exceptionable school in point of morals, maintained that the gods were governed by an irresistible fatality. In conformity with the prevailing sentiments respecting their deities, who were considered as subject to human infirmities and vices, the worship of them consisted in indecent mysteries, and the most barbarous and bloody rites. The soul's immortality was strenuously denied by some, and treated as problematical by all: and, this strong barrier of virtue being removed, they acted in general upon the principle, that this world was the sole inheritance of man. Death they regarded as the gate of eternal separation, and consequently the removal of friends and relatives as a subject merely of barren regret, or gloomy apathy.

It needs no formal proof, that the common peasant, or the day-labourer, under the light of the gospel, possesses juster sentiments of God and his providence, than those distinguished sages, who claimed to be the depositaries of Pagan wisdom. Far from considering his Creator as regardless of the concerns of his suffering creatures, he knows that he is about his path, and about his bed; and that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his permission. Having been taught that God is a spirit, he knows that they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth; that, in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin, he hath no pleasure; and that a broken and contrite heart he will not despise. This world, he is assured, is only the passage to another; and, if the religion in which he hath been instructed has got as far as his heart, he will tell you, that he looks for a better heritage in the world



world which is to come. Hence, when the grave is about to close over the remains of those who were dear to him, he can soothe his sorrows with the conviction, that the grave shall hereafter yield up its dead; and that, *at the latter day, when their Redeemer shall stand upon the earth, they also shall be with him.\**

As impious and unworthy notions of the Deity must necessarily have a bad effect on morals, it is no wonder, that we should discover a suitable conformity between Pagan theology and Pagan ethics. When God is no longer looked up to as the common parent of mankind, men must cease to consider each other in the relationship of brethren, or as entitled to certain rights and privileges by the condition of their nature. Hence, the carrying desolation and carnage round the globe, on no better motive than the extension of territory, or the lust of enterprize, was deemed a monopoly of glory; whilst, the reducing a large proportion of our species to a state of unmerited and abject slavery, found its justification in the supposed right of conquest. The same disregard to the happiness and lives of others, gave establishment to those gladiatorial spectacles, in which many thousands were annually swept from the earth. Domestic confidence was poisoned in its source, by the toleration openly granted to divorces that were the mere profligate offspring of brutality or caprice. And, in consistency with the same relentless system, the exposure of infants was respected as a right arising from paternal authority. Suicide,

\* Job xix. 25. 1 Thess. iv. 14.

far from being execrated, as the consummation of guilt or cowardice, when not the pitiable effect of lunacy, was justified by sages, countenanced by the example of heroes, and even supposed to confer dignity on the perpetrator.

The lamp of Science never shone brighter than during the existence of these enormities; so that it should hardly seem to be saying too much, that the honour was reserved for Religion, to teach men the true use of their faculties.

Many of these evils were either suppressed, or mitigated, by Imperial edicts, on the establishment of Christianity. Not coldly satisfied however with the bare removal of *crimes*, it aimed to destroy the *principles* which led to their perpetration. It hath given to virtue its best security, and to life its highest relish, in making resignation to Providence, both the law and the interest of our being. It hath hallowed the bond of conjugal union; and hath strengthened the ligature of nature that binds the parent to his offspring. It hath not only restrained the dissolute effusion of human blood, but hath awakened sentiments of pity towards all the suffering part of the family of man. It hath produced those high improvements in the law of nations, which philosophy, even in the zenith of its glory, wanted vigour to attempt; and which we may hope to see extended, as the divine spirit of our religion shall be suffered to influence the councils of princes.

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Since the inhuman alternative of putting captives to the sword, or of reducing them to perpetual servitude, hath been done away, war hath abated much of its horror; and, though probably sometimes undertaken on indefensible grounds, such is the respect now paid to publick justice, that contending powers, whatever be their motives to hostility, are far from priding themselves on wantonly violating the tranquillity of mankind. To the honour of the better maxims of the age, they are even constrained to produce their injuries and claims, before they let loose their dreadful hosts to massacre each other, and ruin unoffending thousands.\* WHERE THERE IS YET SHAME, THERE MAY IN TIME BE VIRTUE.† The period may at length arrive, in which policy and morality shall be reconciled; when nothing essentially unjust shall be regarded as advantageous; and when contiguity of situation between countries shall no longer be held up, as a subject of mutual jealousy, but as a motive for drawing still closer the ties of fraternal concord.

\* “ The United States of America, though better situated than any European nation to make profit by *Privateering*, (most of the trade of Europe, with the West Indies, passing before their doors,) are, as far as in them lies, endeavouring to abolish the practice, by offering, in all their treaties with other powers, an article, engaging solemnly, that, in case of future war, no *Privateer* shall be commissioned on either side; and that unarmed ships, on both sides, shall pursue their voyages unmolested.” — The above is an extract of a letter (March 14, 1785) from Dr. Franklin, then at Paris, to a friend in London. If the article in question still continues to be offered, what good man but must wish the adoption of a proposal fraught with so much mercy to mankind.

† Dr. Johnson.

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The situation of that numerous and unhappy class of beings, who were doomed by the fate of war, or other causes, to a state of hopeless bondage, could not fail to attract the compassion of the confessors and patrons of our merciful religion. Accordingly, we find that the offerings of the primitive Christians, at the eucharist, were applied, among other pious uses, to the redemption of their brethren from slavery; that Christian Emperors, in succession, enacted laws, by which multitudes were continually freed; and that not a council was held in the middle age, in which one canon at least did not pass on the subject. Not presuming to make authoritative changes in civil institutions, Christianity contains no positive injunction against slavery, any more than against many other enormities which had the force of law; but, by the spirit of justice and benevolence which it inculcates, it gradually lessened its excesses, and at last abolished it from the face of Europe.

That this barbarous usage, which thus owed its extermination to Christianity, should ever have been revived by men who called themselves Christians, may justly excite our pity and astonishment. The unfeeling spirit of commerce hath been allowed to pollute its gains with blood, and the tears of the sufferers have, for ages, been noted only in the register of heaven. At length, Humanity hath directed its attention to the shores of Africa, with an earnestness that adds honour to the British name and character. And may its inquiries issue in the general conviction, that, no gains, however great, are to be put in competition with the inalienable rights of man, and that, as a nation is exalted and established by righteousness, so it is equally debased and debilitated by the revenues of injustice.

It will shed a lustre on protestantism, superior even to its just trophies in the field of polemical disquisition, to take the lead in promoting a bloodless traffick with the natives of that afflicted region ; and, by giving them a relish for the blessings of civilization, thus gradually to facilitate their reception of the pure religion we profess.

We owe this conduct to ourselves, as Christians and as Englishmen. We owe it to our altars, and our constitution. We owe it to the inhabitants of Africa ; who, in spite of the malevolent and frivolous insinuations of minute philosophers, are men like ourselves, and equally entitled to all the privileges of humanity. They are men whom we have injured, and injured without the tyrant's plea of provocation. And, above all, we owe it, as the best atonement in our power, to the God and Father of mankind, whose image we have so long vilified and degraded, in the persons of these our unhappy brethren.\*

\* The following opinion of the venerable Bishop Sanderfon, who was deemed as sound a casuist as any of his day, and far from a rigid one, is submitted to the reader's notice : " *Lands, houses, cattle, and other like possessions, made for man's use, are the proper subject matter of trade and commerce ; and so are fit to pass from man to man, by sales and other contracts :—But that Man, a creature of such excellency, stamped with the image of God, endowed with a reasonable soul, made capable of grace and glory, should prostrate in foro, become merchantable ware, and be chaffered in markets and fairs, I suppose had been a thing never heard of in the world to this hour, had not the overflowings of pride, and cruelty, and covetousness, washed out of the hearts of men the very impressions both of religion and humanity.*"——Sanderfon's Sermons, 8th Edit. p. 451.

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I am sensible that, in anticipating the time, when moral evil shall be vanquished by the prevailing power of Christianity, we are thought by some persons to choose a theme for pleasing description, rather than sober argument. But, why should it be deemed a thing incredible, that men may, at some time or other, be brought to feel that their duty and their happiness are inseparable, and that the same usage which they would not willingly receive, they ought not to give! That such a time will come, however distant the glorious æra, when the cross shall be victoriously displayed to all nations, we have the testimony of a series of closely-connected prophecies, which have in part been fulfilled, and are visibly fulfilling in our own day. No longer bounded by the *Ultima Thule* of the old world, Christianity hath spread itself along the shores of the *Atlantic*; from which, we doubt not, it will continue to spread, till *the Heathen* of the immense western regions *shall be given for an inheritance* \* to its divine author. The spirit of adventure is daily opening new worlds to curiosity, to commerce, and to philanthropy; where the light of the gospel will hereafter be diffused, if not by ourselves, most certainly, in the event of our remissness, by more favoured instruments. Jerusalem, in the mean time, is *trodden down by the Gentiles*; † and the Jews, under circumstances which must long since have exterminated any other people, remain a standing memorial, that the invisible arm of Christ still rules his kingdom; making *the wrath of men thus turn to his praise*, and pointing our views to that great consummation, when *the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all*

\* Psalm ii. 8.

† St. Luke xxi. 24.



*Israel shall be saved.\** Nor let it be forgotten, that although the complete fall of Antichrist is yet an object of faith, and not of sight, we have beheld his enormous hierarchy shaken to its centre, and the omnipotent usurpation of Rome reduced to little more than an insignificant principality.

Humility and caution do on no occasions so much become us, as in our researches into the ways of Providence; and attempts to fix precise dates and seasons for the accomplishment of prophecies, have usually been the work of men of more imagination than judgment. Their comments have too often brought disrepute on prophecy itself, which *is not of private interpretation*, but, like the luminary of the natural world, embraces a whole system, and can only be discovered by its own effulgence.

It is revealed, with meridian splendour, that THE EARTH SHALL BE FULL OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD; AND THAT, IN CONSEQUENCE OF IT, INJURY AND DESTRUCTION SHALL BE DONE AWAY. Here then, when struck with a view of the disorders and oppressions which cast so dark a shade over Christ's government, we may still the murmurs of inquietude. Animated

\* Romans xi. 2. Whether the future conversion of the Jews will be signalized by their triumphant return to their own land, or whether, in consequence of it, they are to be silently incorporated with Christian nations, is a subject of more curiosity than use. *Nec me pudet fateri nescire, quod nesciam.* Cic. It is sufficient to the argument, that they remain, at this day, an *ocular proof*, that *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.* Rev. xix. 10.

with the rapturous assurance, that the gospel shall hereafter illumine and adorn the moral world, with the same universality that the waters cover the channels of the ocean, we may confidently look forward to that *happier age*, in which men shall beat their swords into ploughshares ; and when the toil and sufferings of millions shall no longer be deemed necessary to the ease and happiness of a few. Meanwhile, resisting visionary calculations, we may indulge emotions of gratitude, that our lot hath fallen in a country, and at a period, when this KNOWLEDGE hath both improved and embellished life ; that, by instructing us in the equality of our nature, it hath tended to ascertain the rights of men ; and, by its consolatory doctrines, that it hath lessened the aggregate of human misery. Whatever be the faults of the community to which we belong, it may safely be affirmed, that neither superstition nor cruelty is its characteristic feature. If our temples are not thronged with worshippers, they are at least inscribed to THE KNOWN GOD, and are not the sanctuaries either of ignorance, or of bigotry. If a fashionable scepticism hath obtained for a season, it hath afforded an opportunity of reviewing the evidences of our religion, and of bringing them forward with additional conviction ; whilst the assaults of its adversaries have served only to evince its resemblance to the mountain-pine, which strikes its roots the deeper for the agitation of its branches.

Among the enlightened part of mankind, who, since the art and freedom of printing have facilitated the means of improvement, are become a more numerous body than the vanity of professed philosophers  
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is willing to allow, God is no longer considered as more acceptably served by men's *opinions* than their *morals*. The prevalence of this sentiment hath led to the humane and just conclusion, that *force* is an illegitimate weapon, when applied to the understanding. Hence it hath come to pass, through the medium of national intercourse, that religious persecution, which, in this kingdom hath long since quenched its torch, has begun to excite disgust in those parts of the world, which were formerly the scenes of its most sanguinary exhibitions. The empire of toleration and of equal laws is evidently enlarging. A gleam of comfort hath been shed even on the dungeons of the inquisition; and the criminal codes of various countries are, at this day, receiving a complexion of mercy, hitherto unknown to the people, but more honourable to Christian legislators than statues of gold.\*

In our own land, Charity appears to flourish, as in her favourite soil, and is stretching forth her boughs unto the sea, and her branches to the remotest rivers. HERE, as the result of liberal investigation, the rubbish of scholastic system hath been removed from the gospel, and our religion shewn to be a law of grace and benevolence: whilst, in A GREAT NEIGHBOURING MONARCHY,

\* See, in particular, the late *Edict of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, for the Reform of Criminal Law in his Dominions*, translated by Mr. HOWARD; —the man who, in refusing a statue, shewed that he doubly deserved one. He who can peruse this edict, without venerating the character of LEOPOLD, DUKE OF TUSCANY, will do himself no injustice in suspecting that he wants the feelings of a man.

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a change hath taken place, that hath mocked all human conjecture on the theory of government, and rendered it probable that the minds of men, sharpened by successful inquiry, may proceed, from the examination of their civil rights, to their *full claim* of privileges as Christians, and finally to the establishment of a purer system of religion.

Let those, who may be disposed to treat this idea as visionary, recollect the mutual support which tyranny and superstition afford each other. The dissolution of that alliance hath ever been regarded as auspicious to the cause of TRUE PHILOSOPHY; and there is no extravagance in supposing, that the fall of superstition may eventually succeed the overthrow of despotism. Neither is the apprehension grounded on any known principle of the human mind, that the speculative Atheism, which hath long infected the philosophy of France, will gain strength, by an open removal of the restraints of bigotry. Atheism is the fullen offspring of superstition; and *free inquiry* is inevitable destruction to every species and degree of it.

Wise men observe that there is, at present, a tendency to something very important in the course of human affairs. They have seen a continent, indefinite in extent, dismembered, at a stroke, from our own empire; and, before they have had time to ascertain the effects of that separation upon the countries immediately concerned, they are summoned to behold its first-fruits on the continent of Europe.

Europe.\* The spirit of reformation hath there gone forth with renovated vigour, and is not likely to be bounded by the kingdom which is the scene of its immediate operation. In several Roman Catholic territories, the same spirit is silently at work; and, for any thing the most sagacious can discern to the contrary, may produce consequences, that, under the controul of Providence, shall hereafter diffuse blessings to the extreme boundaries of the earth.

Historians and philosophers, who have discovered that, the rapid and extensive progress of the gospel was not facilitated by miraculous causes, may perhaps be able to compute its probable success, when the combined efforts of nations shall be exerted in its propagation.

In the mean time, we will hope that, a just sense of their own recovered rights may lead our neighbours to join their endeavours with ours, for extending some portion of the comforts of existence to the oppressed and benighted race of Africans. As their approximation to us in evangelical light and liberty shall be confirmed, we

\* A temporary benefit, which attended the progress of the separation alluded to, hath been thus noticed by the Bishop of London:—"The last war, amidst a multitude of evils, such as war necessarily produces, has been attended with one accidental effect, which, whatever may be thought of it in a commercial view, I do not scruple, in a religious one, to call a blessing. It has very greatly impeded and diminished that opprobrious traffick, in which this country has for a long time taken the lead, the Slave-trade on the Coast of Africa."—Sermon before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, &c. 1783.

trust there will be no diminution of the zeal, which heretofore carried their missionaries through Pagan and Mahometan regions ; and that, far from debasing the gospel with the mythology of barbarous nations, they will come in time to teach it, in purity, to their dependencies in either hemisphere. The cruelties, indeed, that have attended the progress of their revolution, and which must be deplored by every friend of man, afford a melancholy but striking confirmation, that, though a government of mere power may be favourable to the decencies of urbanity, a degree of freedom must foster the virtues of the heart, and shed a popular influence on the principles of our religion.

But whilst, as Christians, we sympathize with the sufferings of antient foes, in their passage from despotism to liberty, it is impossible to contemplate this astonishing change in the sentiments and habits of millions, without an eye to the Supreme Ruler of the earth. He hath condescended to instruct us, that a more endearing union shall take place hereafter among all the members of the family of mankind. The time and manner in which this union shall be effected, he hath concealed with a veil impenetrable by mortals, and which the hand of fanaticism only will attempt to draw aside. Accustomed, on the contrary, to refer the issue of events to their own sagacity, and seldom partial to any predictions but their own, politicians will have their anxieties about the balance of power in centuries to come. On the nice adjustment of this balance, the harmony of contiguous kingdoms, according to *their* theories, must



ultimately depend. And yet, one should think that, only a moderate share of humility might dispose men to trust their Creator with the government of his own world. History and observation abundantly testify, that the best concerted schemes of policy, when directed to remote futurity, are little better than the waking dreams of the speculative and ingenious; and their continual failure is a proof that, however wise the children of this world may be in their generation, they are seldom wise beyond it.

Equally disregarding therefore the reveries of religious and of political projectors, of men who, on this subject, believe too much, and of men who disbelieve every thing, let us fearlessly repose on *the sure word of prophecy*. It has ever been the pride of infidelity, to aggravate the difficulties confessedly connected with the universal prevalence of Christianity; but, let it be a sufficient answer to all objections, that THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH. His word produced light out of chaos; and he can dispel, by methods to which our comprehension is unequal, the darkness and confusion that oppress his moral creation. Let then the scorner delight in his scorning. It is a weapon disgraceful to those only who employ it. Religion hath nothing to fear, either from sarcastic insult, or systematic opposition. It looks down with pity on the impotent rage of its assailants, and would even heal those wounds which its forward friends have sometimes inflicted in its defence. Vain men may dispute its existence, and enthusiasts may disgrace its doctrines; but Christianity, superior to  
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all obstacles, still continues to advance the condition both of nations and individuals, and will finally, if there be truth in scripture, assimilate all things to itself; subduing whatever may *hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain*, and accomplishing the perfection and happiness of the whole human race.

Amidst the revolutions of empire, and the vicissitudes of private life, the plain duty before us is, to pray that Christ's kingdom may come, and that the will of our Universal Father may be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

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all obstacles will continue to advance the condition both of nations and individuals, and will finally, if there be truth in scripture, annihilate all things to itself; leaving whatever may have or enjoy in all God's happy moment, and accomplishing the perfection and happiness of the whole human race.

Amidst the revolutions of empire, and the vicissitudes of private life, the great duty before us is, to pray that God's kingdom may come, and that the will of God in heaven may be done on earth, as it is in heaven.



